



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

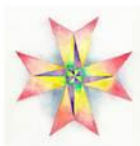
*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## Christ the King A



Parable of Christ: "Separating the sheep from the goats."  
Mosaic of a Ravennate Italian-Byzantine workshop,  
completed within 526 AD by the so-called "Master of Sant 'Apollinare".  
Basilica of Sant 'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

### Divine Praises of Saint Francis

You are holy, Lord,  
the only God,  
and your deeds are wonderful.  
You are strong,  
you are great,  
you are the Most High,  
you are the almighty King.  
You, holy Father,  
are King of the heaven and earth.  
You are Three and One,  
God above all gods.  
You are good, all good, supreme good,  
Lord God, living and true.  
You are love,  
You are wisdom,  
You are humility,  
You are endurance,  
You are beauty,  
You are gentleness,  
You are security,  
You are rest,  
You are joy.  
You are our hope and happiness,  
You are justice and moderation,  
You are all our riches,  
You are beauty,  
You are gentleness,

You are our protector,  
You are our guardian and defender.  
You are strength,  
You are consolation,  
You are our hope,  
You are our faith,  
You are our charity,  
You are all our sweetness,  
You are our eternal life,  
great and admirable Lord,  
God almighty,  
merciful Savior.

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& Creed**  
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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks culminate in today's liturgy: Jesus' eschatological teaching regarding what one must do to gain eternal life.
- ▶ In this last day of the liturgical cycle we contemplate God's ultimate act of salvation, the death and resurrection of his only Son and the salvation he won for us.
- ▶ We contemplate on final judgment and whether or not we will be ready when the Lord calls us home. .
- ▶ We will not hear the story of Christ from Matthew's perspective for another two years. We enter a new liturgical year next week in which the Christ event will be told from the perspective of St. Mark.
- ▶ The feast of the Solemnity of Christ the King is called an idea feast.
- ▶ It recalls the feast of Ascension, Epiphany and Palm Sunday, all feasts that exalt Christ in his sovereign Kingship.
- ▶ Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in his Encyclical Letter *Quas primas*, Dec.11, 1925. It was in response to the destructive evils of the time. He insisted that only the sovereignty of Christ's Lordship and Kingship over the world was a force powerful enough to overcome such evil and destruction.
- ▶ "...It is necessary that the royal dignity of Our Lord be recognized and accepted as widely as possible. To this end it seems to Us that nothing else would help so effectively as the institution of a special feast dedicated to Christ our King. The annual celebration of the sacred mysteries is more effective in informing people about the Faith and in bringing them the joys of the spiritual life than the solemn pronouncements of the teaching Church. Documents are often read only by a few learned men; feasts move and teach all the faithful. The former speaks but once; the latter every year and forever. The former bring a saving touch to the intellect; the latter influence not only the mind but the heart and man's whole nature". <sup>1</sup>
- ▶ The world was experiencing the emergence of fascism, and the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The Church lost its political power and the immorality of the twenties was rampant.
- ▶ This feast was eventually moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical year.
- ▶ The focus addresses the theology of eschatology: last things, end times, eternal life and anticipation of Christ's return.
- ▶ The liturgy of Christ the King upholds Christ's universal reign and Lordship not just evident in today's liturgy but celebrated in every Eucharistic liturgy.
- ▶ There are consonant themes at the end of the liturgical year with the beginning of the New Year. Both the ending and the beginning exalt the Christ who is Lord of the Universe and who reigns as Lord and King of the world and who will one day return to take us all home to be with him forever in eternity.

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<sup>1</sup>AAS 17 (1925), 593-610. In Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 177.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on first or second readings and concentrate on the Gospel. Perhaps provide a brief summary review of both readings and then move on to the Gospel.

## First Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

- ▶ The prophet Ezekiel was God's appointed guardian over Israel. He was Israel's watchman.
- ▶ Like other prophets before him, his message was a difficult message for the people to hear. Just as they rejected the prophet Jeremiah, they rejected Ezekiel just as much.
- ▶ Ezekiel would not be silenced. God's word would go forth from him; he would not be deterred.
- ▶ It was his God-given appointment to speak God's word to the people.
- ▶ The responsibility to hear and embrace God's word was on the shoulders of the people.
- ▶ Ezekiel's primary message is God's judgment. Ezekiel insists that God will judge those who ignore the poor among them and those who engage in the worship of false idols.
- ▶ God will punish Israel for her sins, but God is merciful and forgiving. God always forgives his people when they turn to him and repent.
- ▶ God was and is in covenant relationship with the people yet the people continuously broke (break) that covenant by their sinfulness.
- ▶ Ezekiel's job as watchman was to wake the people from their sleep and challenge their lackadaisical adherence to the covenant that God forged with them.
- ▶ Prior to Ezekiel, the message to Israel was a communal corporate message. Ezekiel makes a bold move and preached personal responsibility. It was always believed that Israel sinned as a people, not as individuals. Ezekiel challenges the people to accept personal responsibility for personal sin. He invites a return to holiness and a return to the covenant.
- ▶ The shepherd motif is a common metaphor in ancient agricultural communities.
- ▶ The shepherd was a disciplined task master. He managed his sheep with precision, but he also loved them.
- ▶ The master knew each sheep by name and each sheep in turn knew the sound of his master's voice.
- ▶ Sheep wandered in the wilderness each day. The master and his dog guided the flock as they grazed in the open fields, protecting them from robbers, and the elements.
- ▶ Such is the backdrop for today's reading.
- ▶ God does not relinquish his responsibility to care for his sheep to another person. God alone is responsible for his people. God will seek out the lost sheep and return them to the fold.

- ▶ God will however, bring order to the flock and deal definitively with any sheep that might lead the flock away, the rambunctious sheep or goat whose behavior threatens the entire herd is removed from the herd and often destroyed.
- ▶ God will not allow the strong to trample on the weak. God will protect those who cannot take care of themselves.
- ▶ Ezekiel chastised the former Jewish kings of the southern kingdom. They were not true to the covenant. They were false shepherds.
- ▶ Ezekiel insists that God will overturn their authority and assume their leadership responsibilities.
- ▶ God, not the kings, would shepherd the people, restore them and bring them home from exile.
- ▶ They need not look to the monarchy. God will rule the people. God will rule Israel.
- ▶ We see the emerging hope for a future messiah in the promise that God will appoint another ruler like David to restore Israel.
- ▶ The good shepherd image is a common metaphor that describes a strong, virile, athletic, weather beaten man accustomed to battling the elements to protect his sheep.
- ▶ Such a shepherd is willing and eager to sacrifice his own life to care for his them.
- ▶ God is such a Shepherd. He protects his people with love and compassion. God extends his mercy to those who repent.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Time permitting, catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ How is this a relevant word for believers today?
- ▶ Has God ever been a Shepherd for you?
- ▶ Has God ever led you back to the fold when you were lost?
- ▶ What does it mean to you to be a lost sheep?
- ▶ Who are the prophets today in the spirit of Ezekiel?
- ▶ Who is our watchman?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about our relationship with God?



## Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

- ▶ Very often fundamentalists have used this and verse twenty of the Book of Revelation as a proof text for their beliefs concerning Jesus' second coming and the end of the world.
- ▶ Fundamentalist belief asserts that when Christ returns the faithful will rule the earth for one thousand years. Before that time the earth will thus be dominated by Gog and Magog. This belief has a long and ancient history dating back to early centuries.
- ▶ However, Catholic interpretation of the Bible is neither literalist nor fundamentalist. Catholic interpretation relies on cultural studies, literary genres of the day and contemporary scholarship to assist us in discovering the literal and spiritual sense of the text.
- ▶ When people interpret the Scripture with a literal or fundamentalist focus, it limits our understanding of Scripture.
- ▶ Since the liturgical year is coming to a close and our focus has been on our eschatological truths concerning the last days, the end of time and final judgment, a primary verse for our reflection would be verse twenty-four. "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power".
- ▶ Paul insists that Jesus will deliver his rule into God's hands.
- ▶ Christ's reign will last from his ascension into glory until his return. We are living in Christ's reign now. We live in the "last days".
- ▶ Thus, Christ's reign is synonymous with the reign of both his kingdom and his Church.
- ▶ Peace will not reign in this interim time.
- ▶ War will consume us. The Church will be at war with the enemies of God in Christ.
- ▶ God will lead and guide the Church through this time of tension.
- ▶ God's work in the Church continues Christ's redeeming, sacrificial mission.
- ▶ After Jesus' return and his saving work is completed, God will deal with the world-definitively.
- ▶ Paul speaks of a new Adam. Paul compared the first Adam, the first human to the new Adam, Christ and his saving work.
- ▶ Adam sinned thus necessitating the incarnation of Jesus and his reconciling mission.
- ▶ Freedom from the slavery of Adam's sin and the continuation of our own sinfulness is a present day reality, it is not simply something to hope for in the after-life. It is a present reality. We are freed from the power of sin and death, here and now.
- ▶ When Christians join their lives to Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of his Spirit, his Paschal Mystery, they are freed from the lasting effects of sin.
- ▶ Jesus is our "first fruits" referred to in the reading.

- ▶ “First fruits” refers in Jewish parlance to the consecration of the first fruits of the harvest.
- ▶ Christ is our consecrated harvest. He promises us an abundant harvest, full of peace, righteousness and immersion in the life of Christ.
- ▶ We share his “first fruits” now as we await the future glory with him in heaven.
- ▶ We experience those “first fruits” now through prayer, liturgy, sacraments and in the community of the faithful, pilgrim people who journey toward the promised land of eternal reward but reap the harvest of righteousness in the here and now.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Provided there is ample time, catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ In what way has Christ gifted you with an abundant harvest?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in Paul’s letter?
- ▶ In what way does this text challenge you to be a better disciple?
- ▶ What does Christ’s kingship have to do with your life of discipleship?
- ▶ Are you a Christian that focuses only on the hope of eternity or do you acknowledge Christ offering his “first fruits” in the here and now? Please explain how you came to your conclusion.
- ▶ What should be the Christian community’s response to the cosmic, pre-existent Lord of the Universe? How can we make this a personal word today for us as believers? In other words, in what does this reading challenge our everyday lives?
- ▶ What attitude or posture or behavior in you does this reading challenge?

## Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ Matthew insists that we give honor and worship to the King of all Kings by our observable actions.
- ▶ Is there evidence in our lives that we have committed our lives to the justice God demands for his lowly ones?
- ▶ Christ came for the lowly and oppressed. He is Lord of their lives and expects us to do his bidding. When the poor and oppressed are not cared for we fail in our responsibility and thus can be considered among the goats, not the sheep.
- ▶ The kingdom our glorified Lord and King established is one in which the least among us has been given an exalted place at the table. The poor and oppressed have been freed from bondage. The alien from a foreign land has been welcomed, prisoners have been freed and love, compassion and God's own mercy has been extended to the lost and broken among us.
- ▶ Matthew's Gospel today focuses on final judgment.
- ▶ Judgment parables stress the requisites for passage into the new and eternal Jerusalem on the last day.
- ▶ Such judgment themes are considered apocalyptic in tone, looking toward the end of time. Matthew was familiar with apocalyptic literature.
- ▶ Apocalyptic fever was high at the time Matthew's Gospel was written. It was rife in both Jewish and Egyptian circles.
- ▶ What sets Christian apocalyptic apart from other apocalyptic thinking is love. Love will determine whether a person will ultimately get in line with the sheep or the goats.
- ▶ Evidence of this love will be judged by ethical action. Love, mercy, compassion, barometers of loving behavior, will be the hallmark of Christian judgment. Action will indeed speak louder than words.
- ▶ The hungry will be fed, the thirsty will be given drink, and the homeless will be provided shelter. Those on the margins of our communities will be welcomed.
- ▶ Every loving action will be considered when it comes to God's decision. Every loving action is significant regardless of how grandiose or miniscule the action is.
- ▶ God loves his people unconditionally. God's love is not merited. It is freely offered and must be freely received. Those who have experienced God's gratuitous love can do no less than respond in kind and extend God's self-less love to others. It is etched in the covenant God forged with the human race since the world began.





## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Participants pause and consider the material just presented and respond to one or more of the following questions before going further.

- ▶ Who are the hungry in our midst?
- ▶ Who are people who are still in bondage in our world?
- ▶ Who is the stranger that needs the welcoming hand of Christ?
- ▶ In what way have you (we) participated in the condition that keeps them homeless, imprisoned, unwelcomed?
- ▶ In what way have you (we) or do you (we) care for them?
- ▶ How difficult is it to see Christ the King in such people?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Matthew uses metaphors and images common to the cultural experience of first century Palestinians when presenting his catechism on the reign of God.
- ▶ Shepherds tended their sheep daily.
- ▶ Every shepherd was charged with the responsibility of caring for his own sheep.
- ▶ Each shepherd led his sheep into the wilderness. Side by side with other shepherds they watched over their flocks as they grazed for the day.
- ▶ At the end of the day all the shepherds led their sheep back to a common gated enclosure.
- ▶ One shepherd was charged with the responsibility of standing guard over the gate. The other shepherds left their sheep in his care.
- ▶ He would lie down and place his own body over the enclosure to the sheepfold offering his life if need be to protect them.
- ▶ Shepherds tended goats as well as sheep; both animals grazed side by side in a common pasture.
- ▶ At night fall the sheep and goats were separated.
- ▶ Sheep were stronger than the goats and were thus able to survive the cold nights better than the goats.
- ▶ At some point in the story the shepherd separates the two.
- ▶ One interpretation of this parable suggests that this is not a comparison between the sheep and the goats but rather a means to describe the facts of final judgment. Just like sheep and goats are separated at the end of the day, so there will be a similar division at the *end of days*.
- ▶ The Lord, Shepherd and Judge will indeed preside in judgment over people at the end of the world.
- ▶ Positive judgment depends on whether the one being judged accepts Jesus Christ and his work of redemption.

- ▶ Jesus' message to his disciples is clear. Judgment is coming and will be meted out to those who reject Jesus and his mission.
- ▶ It is interesting to note that this is the only place in the Gospel in which Jesus accepts his royal title. Scholars suggest that this may have been a later insertion into the text in light of how the Christian community came to understand Jesus and his mission.
- ▶ The Gospel glorifies the resurrected, ascended and exalted Christ who takes his rightful place at the Father's right hand from which he will judge the living and the dead.
- ▶ Jesus Christ, Son of God, King of Kings, exalted Lord and Savior, one with God in being, is placed on salvation history's center stage.
- ▶ An important note: very often scholars weigh in differently on various Scripture passages depending on their point of view—according to their cultural, historical or spiritual bias. There are many ways to interpret Scripture. Great strides have been made in recent years when it comes to understanding the culture of Jesus' day. Understanding that culture helps provide us with the way in which first century listeners heard the stories we proclaim today. While what we hear today is a valid and important way for us to hear Scripture, it is also important to know what was actually meant at the time. What did those same words mean then as opposed to what they mean to us today? Tradition has breathed life into the Biblical texts over our two thousand year history, but knowing their original meanings is an incredibly valuable way to understand the mind and heart of those who first heard these stories in their own milieu.
- ▶ Let us therefore turn back to the sheep to discover deeper meaning.
- ▶ The ancients were impressed by the way in which sheep accepted their suffering silently.
- ▶ Men were judged according to the way in which they were able to silently endure suffering.
- ▶ Sheep were a sign of strength, nobility, respect, honor and manhood.
- ▶ Goats were a symbol of shame and disgust.
- ▶ Perhaps this parable asks a different question. Perhaps it asks: "Who is welcomed and who is not welcomed?" Perhaps this is a parable stressing the importance of hospitality.
- ▶ Hospitality offered to strangers is an important mandate throughout Biblical history. Scholars suggest that Sodom and Gomorra was on the brink of destruction for its refusal to offer hospitality to God's messengers.
- ▶ When hospitality was offered to the stranger it was believed that it was God's own hospitality being offered.
- ▶ Hospitality and kindness offered to one's neighbor, family and friends was considered of no consequence because what was being offered was steadfast love not hospitality. Steadfast love was expected.
- ▶ The sheep are the ones that offer hospitality to the hungry, thirsty and homeless—to the stranger. Regardless of whether that person is a Christian, Jewish or pagan, those who extend hospitality can be counted among the sheep.
- ▶ Offering hospitality to stranger is akin to offering it to Christ.

- ▶ Goats were the ones who refused to offer the requisite hospitality intended by God and sacred Scripture.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Today's liturgy invites us to see Christ in the most unusual places--to acknowledge Christ's messenger in places where we would least expect and in people we would least expect to find it. Where are some places and who are some people in which we would least expect to find the presence of Christ?
- ▶ In what way does this challenge we who are baptized to live more fully the grace and call of our baptism? For those who are preparing for baptism, in what way are you challenged to grow more deeply like Christ and thus become a better disciple? What are the implications of this parable for your life?
- ▶ In what way do you consider yourself among the sheep? Conversely, in what way do you consider yourself among the goats? How might God see you if final judgment were to occur today? Affirm what is good and what needs to change in your life.
- ▶ Have you ever refused hospitality to one of God's lowly ones? Conversely have you ever extended hospitality to one of those same lowly ones? Looking back how do you feel about both scenarios? In what way does today's Gospel speak to your response?
- ▶ When did you become aware of the salvation, forgiveness and redemption that were always available to you? What evidence is there in your life that you have accepted it?
- ▶ What evidence is there that growth is needed—that you have not yet fully accepted God's forgiveness, salvation and redemption?
- ▶ What are the implications of this gospel?
- ▶ If Jesus died on the cross for our salvation and he in turns invites us to do what he did for the ongoing redemption of the world, for who are you called to carry the cross in your life?
- ▶ In what way have you carried the cross for others in your own life?
- ▶ What does this story teach us about God's relationship with us?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

Prayer of St. Ambrose

Let us pray,

Carry me, Christ,

on the Cross,

which is salvation to the wanderers,

sole rest for the wearied,

wherein alone is life for those who die.

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

## Appendix

- In what way do you consider yourself among the sheep? Conversely, in what way do you consider yourself among the goats? How might God see you if final judgment were to occur today? Affirm what is good and what needs to change in your life.

Every time I embrace the cross in my life, offer it up, and join it to Christ's suffering for the ongoing redemption of the world, I participate in his sacrificial death and resurrection. At such times I am a sheep.

We are promised that if we live the paschal mystery of Christ we will be counted among the sheep. When I refuse to put my hope and trust in Christ and his merciful saving works I am indeed a goat. I might as well jump the sheep line and file in with my fellow goats.

I have learned a great deal about the paradox of the cross and what it means to live a sheep's life by striving each day to live with a loved one with a debilitating, life-destroying illness. I have learned that love is a decision. If God can love me in my arrogance, and contrariness—my goat-ness, then I can do no less than offer unconditional love to one who is often times very difficult to love. When I offer up the sorrow of watching the future of an extremely intelligent young person wither before me, I am tempted to lose hope and wonder about God's plan for his life—an extremely tormented life.

Yet the paradox of the cross, the salvation it offers, the faith it requires of me reminds me that there is hope and that salvation does rise like a phoenix out of the ashes of despair. I simply must relinquish control and watch God's saving power unfold before me. So many times I have seen God's hand lead us through the devastating years of this journey. There are times that God is silent and I am called to remember when he wasn't. The cross, however, is my hope. When situations seem hopeless and lead me to the brink of despair I remember that I can find meaning in suffering and offer hope to those who have no hope. The cross is my anchor. I thank God for its power in my life. Without it I would not survive the day-to-day struggle. Thus I thank God for the days I behave like a sheep and ask forgiveness for the days that I look more like a goat than a sheep.





# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Jesus Christ  
Cross, Paschal Mystery  
Salvation/Soteriology  
Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and  
Purgatory.

Church and Ecclesiology  
Holy Orders  
Church Structure  
Sacrament of Baptism  
Liturgical Year

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## JESUS CHRIST

The Old Testament reading speaks of the valued treasure of wisdom. As Christians we believe that wherever wisdom exists, the Holy Spirit is present. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the HOLY SPIRIT.

## CROSS and PASCHAL MYSTERY

This feast is feast par excellence in which to remember Christ, the Sovereign Lord and King who came to shepherd his people and save the world by the blood of the Cross. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

## SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

This feast is feast par excellence in which to remember Christ, the Sovereign Lord and King who came to shepherd his people and save the world by the blood of the Cross. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

## ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

These last days of the liturgical year focus on last things, end times and Jesus return. The division of sheep and goats is a reminder of the judgment by Christ our sovereign King at the end of time. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. Such righteous people line up with the sheep not the goats. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

## **CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY**

The Ezekiel sequence speaks of the shepherd who ruled over his flock with strength and discipline, and who was also very close to them. He knew them by name and they knew the sound of his voice. The shepherd and shepherding are commonly used metaphors in the Bible for kings, leaders, for ministry and for God. God is ultimately responsible for shepherding his flock. God will find those sheep that are lost and bring them back. That role has been entrusted to the Church today. We are challenged to purify our hearts in order to shepherd God's people just as Jesus shepherded them. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about the **CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY**.

## **HOLY ORDERS**

The Ezekiel sequence speaks of the shepherd who ruled over his flock with strength and discipline, and who was also very close to them. He knew them by name and they knew the sound of his voice. The shepherd and shepherding are commonly used metaphors in the Bible for kings, leaders, for ministry and for God. God is ultimately responsible for shepherding his flock. God will find those sheep that are lost and bring them back. That role has been entrusted to the Church today and the ordained priesthood has an ultimate, significant role. We are challenged to purify our hearts in order to shepherd God's people just as Jesus shepherded them. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of **HOLY ORDERS**.

## **CHURCH STRUCTURE**

The Ezekiel sequence speaks of the shepherd who ruled over his flock with strength and discipline, and who was also very close to them. He knew them by name and they knew the sound of his voice. The shepherd and shepherding are commonly used metaphors in the Bible for kings, leaders, for ministry and for God. God is ultimately responsible for shepherding his flock. God will find those sheep that are lost and bring them back. That role has been entrusted to the Church today in the fullness of all its ministries—the ministry of the faithful, clergy, religious, bishops, cardinals and pope. We are challenged to purify our hearts in order to shepherd God's people just as Jesus shepherded them. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of **CHURCH STRUCTURE**.

## **BAPTISM**

There is a tradition in the early Church in which people were baptized on this feast. People are baptized into the Lordship of Christ—his sovereignty in their lives, his kingdom and ultimately his saving mission. It is only fitting that this would be an acceptable feast for celebrating the sacrament that incorporates us into Christ's death and resurrection. Today we will focus our doctrinal session on the sacrament of **BAPTISM**.

## LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. As the present Church year is winding down and a new year is soon to begin, it is appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.